

SPRING 2003



The FLAP

News for the Folks of Lake Accotink Park

www.fairfaxcounty.gov

703-569-0285



Post-Drought Salt in the Wound

In the Fall 2002 issue of the FLAP we wrote about the effect of drought on all types of creatures. The ecology of our streams was hit especially hard by last year's drought. The base of the food chain—the “bugs” that live in streambeds—was devastated when the streams shrank or dried up entirely. Under natural conditions, the wet weather and snow we now are having would be ideal to give these critters a leg

up on recovery. But, highly developed Fairfax County is not in a natural state; around here, winter weather often means road salt. With our dependence on roads and pavement, road salt is a necessary tool for safety and convenience in our daily lives. But when that salt runs off the asphalt and into our streams, it turns the water from fresh to brackish, wreaking havoc with the “bugs” that are still reeling from the prolonged drought. The

double-whammy of the drought followed by ongoing salt runoff are seriously compromising the health of our streams. The longterm effects on the ability of species to recover is unknown and will require ongoing study by environmental groups. Meanwhile, you can do your part to help. At home, sweep or scrape up any excess salt left on the road. Save it to sprinkle on your doorstep next time it snows. You'll help yourself and the earth

For the Birds

Have you ever seen the iridescent flash of a hummingbird in your yard? Would you like that chance again? With the right landscaping you can transform your yard into a habitat that will attract birds, butterflies and other wildlife. The key is to plant trees and shrubs that are native to the area. Often termed a “backyard habitat,” such a garden can be planted anywhere on your property. The habitat can be as simple as butterfly garden of milkweeds and butterfly bushes—or as complicated as a multi-layered landscape that provides year round food, roosting and nesting space for birds.

By focusing on native plants, which require less care than exotic commercial plants, your backyard habitat will not only make

your yard a more enjoyable place, it will give you more time to enjoy it. Converting grassy areas to places abundant with flowers, shrubs and trees will reduce runoff from your yard, thus conserving water. Consider planting a rain garden where it will intercept runoff from your roof; such a location is ideal for growing beautiful wetlands plants like rosemallow and ironweed. And to entice those hummingbirds? Plant lilies and lobelia (cardinal flower is one type).

There are many possibilities for creating a landscape that you will enjoy and that will be just the thing for the birds.

For more information about backyard habitats contact the National Wildlife Federation at 703-438-6100 or visit www.nwf.org/

backyard wildlife habitat. Get a good start on your habitat today by participating in the Northern Virginia Soil and Water Conservation District's seedling sale going on right now.

NVSWCD 2003 Seedling Sale

GET 14 SEEDLINGS FOR JUST \$16.95

- 2 Common Witch hazel
- 2 Spice Bush
- 2 Eastern Redbud
- 2 Silky Dogwood
- 2 Graystem Dogwood
- 4 Shortleaf Pine

For an order form or more information call the Northern Virginia Soil and Water Conservation District, 703-324-1460. Or stop by the Lake Accotink Park main office off Highland Street.

Look Inside: Spring/Summer Camps and Classes!!

Vernal Pools: Springs of Life

by Axel Boy

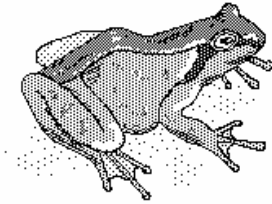
Every year at about this time, where ever the world is awaking from winter, pools begin to appear in the forests and grasslands. Within these pools the next generation of amphibian and insect life is being spawned. Unaware of this miracle of nature taking place, the casual observer on a quiet walk through the wood may wonder, "Where do these pools come from?" The answer provides an intriguing glimpse into the natural ebb and flow which nature quietly orchestrates.

There are two kinds of pools found in the natural environment: vernal and perennial. Vernal simply means "spring" and vernal pools are those that exist generally from late March until summer. What sets them apart ecologically from perennial pools, or those that exist year-round, is the absence of fish. Without fish to threaten their existence, amphibians and insects find relatively safe haven in these temporary pools.

Vernal pools may form as a result of underground springs that well up as the water table rises; other vernal pools are created from rainwater, melting snow, and run off from the surrounding areas. During the hottest summer months the majority of these pools dry up because of the heat and lack of rain. But by then, they have served their purpose, having provided the perfect habitat for all kinds of creatures to get their start in life.

Vernal pools offer high levels of nutrients to support the quick maturation of an amazing variety of organisms. Rotting vegetation enhance rapid growth for insect larvae, tadpoles and salamanders. Many types of insects come early to lay their eggs in these pools. Many species of amphibians mate only in vernal pools.

Frogs, toads, and salamanders all mate in the early spring, before many snakes and other predators are active. This gives the adults a better chance of migrating from the woods to the pools unharmed and gives the offspring a chance to grow, metamorphose, and mature enough to become adept at hiding and escape.



During the early spring the first amphibians begin to look for mates. Arriving at the pools, the male frogs and toads begin to chirp and croak until they attract a female. Some species, like

the spring peepers and the chorus frogs, are known by their distinctive croaking. This sound is one of the pleasant harbingers of spring.

Lacking hard shells, amphibian eggs need water for support and protection from drying out. Most amphibian eggs take about a week to hatch into tadpoles, and from there they mature into adult frogs, toads, and salamanders. As nearly every school child learns, this change from egg to tadpole to adult is called metamorphosis.

During their first few weeks of life the young eat algae and many of the smaller insects and creatures that call the pool home. Young salamanders and tadpoles are known to cannibalize their own brothers and sisters, besides eating anything else unlucky enough to run into these tiny terrors.

One of the main advantages to breeding in vernal pools is the lack of fish. Without fish preying on them, the pool's growing life has a much better chance of survival. However, they are not completely out of danger. Dragonfly larvae, for example, are voracious eaters and will devour almost any small life forms that make their homes

in the pools. Insect larvae prey on amphibians and each other, and amphibians return the favor by preying on insect larvae as well as on each other. Fortunately for those who enjoy the outdoors, the larval life teeming in these pools eats most of the mosquito larvae that live there too.

Not only do vernal pools provide excellent habitat for amphibians and insect life, they also provide an ideal place for many plants to call home. All kinds of plant life thrive in the nutrient-rich vernal pools. A healthy pool supports a variety of algae. These small single-cell plants will cover a pool if there is enough sunlight hitting the surface. Algae plants cling to amphibians' eggs from which they draw nutrition. In return the algae passes on oxygen to the embryos. When the eggs hatch the tadpoles feed on the algae attached to their eggs. The algae provide cover for the eggs and larvae, the better to hide from predators. Other plants that live in and around the pools are jack-in-the-pulpit, skunk cabbage and, farther north, the threatened lady slipper orchids. For a myriad of species, vernal pools are essential to life.



Although vernal pools are technically wetlands, most are too small to enjoy legal protection. Each year countless vernal pools

are paved over to make way for houses and other urban expansion projects. If protection is not granted to vernal pools in the near future, many species like the tiger salamander, chorus frog, and fairy shrimp will exist only in memory. Generations after us may never see these cradles of life. Just as the fabled fountain of youth restores life, so do vernal pools ensure that every year a new generation brings forth life.

Spring and Summer 2003

Camps and Classes at Lake Accotink Park

For more information about the classes listed below, please see the Spring edition of *Parktakes* magazine or visit:

www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/parktakes.htm

Or call: **Lake Accotink Park: 703-569-0285**

Spring

New! Tennis Camp for Youth

4/14-4/18 M-F 9am-12pm
Ages 8-12 or 1pm to 4 pm

New! Exploring Your Watershed

Observe and learn about plants and animals in the park; learn to assess stream health and factors that affect it. Full-day program will include canoeing, hiking, games, crafts, and other activities.

4/14-4/18 M-F 9am-12:00pm,
Ages 8-12 or 9am-4pm

New! Dog Camp for Kids

Teaches responsible pet ownership and fun for you and your pet.

4/14-4/18 M-F 9am-12:00pm
Ages 8-11

New! Dog Camp for Teens

Teaches responsible pet ownership and fun for you and your pet.

4/14-4/18 M-F 1pm-4pm
Ages 12-15 yrs

Discover Nature Art Class

This course is designed to teach fundamental drawing skills to children by introducing them to nature. They will observe, touch, and draw trees. Students should wear outdoor play clothes. Supplies not included; a supply list will be provided.

10/ 55 minute classes Ages 6-8 yrs
\$63 Saturday 10am Begin 3/29

Discover Watercolors w/ Nature

This course is designed to teach beginning water color painting to children by introducing them to nature. They will observe nature and paint what they see. Most classes indoors with outdoor field trips in the park. Supplies not included; supply list provided.

10/ 55 minute classes Ages 6-8 yrs
\$63 Saturday 10am Begin 3/29

Boot Camp

Fun, physical training that includes a combination of calisthenics, floor exercise, and track work. Great for the intermediate or advanced exerciser who is looking for a fresh and challenging way to mix things up.

12/ One hour and 25 minute classes
\$103 Saturday 7am Begin 3/29

Biking for Fitness

Learn the basics of cycling, *OUTSIDE!* Cycle maintenance, proper equipment and clothing is all covered. Come prepared to ride during the first class and don't forget your helmet, it's required.

11/ 55 minute classes
\$71 Saturday 10am Begin 3/29

Walking for Fitness

Walk your way to fitness! Tone your abs and reduce your hips, thighs, and gluts. This aerobic workout is great for beating stress and getting into shape. Meet on track, rain or shine.

11/ 55 minute classes
\$71 Saturday 9am Begin 3/29

Walking for Fitness, Doggie and Me
Walk your dog and yourself at the same time! This class is designed to keep you and your dog healthy. All dogs need to be on a leash.

10/ 55 minute classes
\$78 Saturday 11am Begin
New! 3/29

Summer

Tennis Camp for Youth-
One week sessions during summer.

6/23-6/27, 7/14-7/18, 7/28-8/1, 8/11-8/15
M-F 1pm-4pm Ages 8-12

Outdoor Fun Camp

Boating, fishing, archery, orienteering, field games, crafts.

New! 6/23-7/3, 7/7-7/18, 7/21-8/1, 8/4-8/15
M-F 9am-4pm Ages 6-12

Dog Camp for Kids

Teaches responsible pet ownership and fun for you and your pet.

6/23-6/27, 7/14-7/18, 8/11-8/15
M-F 9am-12:00pm Ages 8-11

New! Outdoor Theatre for Teens

Be part of a troupe led by a drama professional. Learn set design, costume design, performance techniques, etc. Two-week camp culminates in a Saturday evening lakeside performance for parents and other guests.
8/4-8/22

Registration Begins February 11

If you have comments or questions regarding the FLAP, or if you are interested in contributing an article please contact:

Zach Myers, Editor or Tawny Hammond, Park Manager

703-569-0285

**FAIRFAX COUNTY
PARK AUTHORITY**

Lake Accotink Park
7500 Accotink Park Road
Springfield VA 22150

Phone: 703-569-0285
Fax: 703-913-1298
<http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov>

WANTED:

Instructors & Camp Counselors

Many Positions Available!

Competitive Wages!

Children's Art Instructor for the following classes:



- Discover Nature
- Discover Watercolors w/ Nature

Special Requirements:

- Must have art instructor experience
- Available Saturdays beginning March 29, from 9:00-11:00am
- Good with children
- Competitive Wages

Walking and Biking for Fitness Instructor for the following classes:



- Walking for Fitness
- Walking for Fitness Doggy & Me
- Biking for Fitness

Special Requirements:

- Fitness instructor experience preferred
- Available Saturdays beginning March 29, from 9:00-11:00am
- Competitive Wages

Summer Counselors and Coordinators:

- Camp Counselors
- Assistant Coordinators

Special Requirements:

- Good with children
- Like the outdoors
- Must have a flexible schedule
- Available all summer-day camp



Tennis Instructors for:



- Summer Camp
- Tennis Classes

Special Requirements:

- Tennis experience
- Good with children
- \$16-17 per hour
- Must be available all summer for day camps

Summer Theatre Instructor



Special Requirements:

- Theatre experience
- Good with children
- Like the outdoors
- Competitive Wages
- Must be available August 4-22, 2003
9am-4pm
- Organizational skills to plan daily itinerary

Spring Break Camp Instructors for:

- Day Camp
- Tennis Camp
- Dog Care Camp

Special Requirements:

- Tennis experience required
- Good with children
- Competitive Wages
- Like the outdoors
- Must be available April 14-18, 2003



For more information please contact Jessica Sheehan or James McGlone at (703) 569-3464

Call Today for an Interview!

**** All interested applicants must be at least 18 years old*